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Writer Recalls Early Rivalry Between D & H Canal Men And Erie Workers

Canal Company Blocked Erie From Using Route; Boatmen Saw In Coming Of Railroad A Threat To Their Livelihood; Many Brawls Resulted

Today The News presents the seventh article in the series on the Delaware and Hudson Canal, pioneer carrier of anthracite coal, which was published originally in the Monthly Bulletin of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Public Affairs. The articles were written by E. D. LeRoy, member of the Board of Trustees of the Wayne County Historical Society.

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By E. D. LeROY

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At Deposit in the Delaware Valley just north of the Pennsylvania line, on November 7, 1835, ground was broken for the construction of the New York, Lake Erie, and Western Railroad, now the "Erie". It will be recalled that the sponsors of the D. & H. Canal had hoped that a branch canal would eventually be built up the Delaware from the mouth of the Lackawaxen. It never materialized, nor did the Erie reach the Delaware Valley for another 12 years, for, after the elaborate ceremonies at Deposit, there were no funds to proceed with the work.

Early Survey Discounted

In this connection a map by Daniel Burr, dated 1939, is of interest as it shows the route originally surveyed for the Erie. A more accurate survey in 1845 proved this route to be too mountainous and the attention of the Erie engineers was directed to the Valley of the Delaware which was already occupied by the Delaware & Hudson Canal. Erie engineer A. C. Morton proposed building the railroad along the route of the canal. The route was surveyed and it was found that between Port Jervis and the mouth of the Lackawaxen it

would be necessary to bridge the canal seven times but, what is more astounding, he proposed that, under Hawke's Nest Mountain, the railroad should be built upon the bed of the river. The canal already hugged the base of the cliff which rises several hundred feet abruptly out of the river. How long such a roadbed would have withstood the battering of the ice is a moot question.

The canal company (to the good fortune of the Erie) lost no time in obtaining an injunction prohibiting the Erie from building over this route, leaving but one alternative—the Erie must cross over into Pike County. The difficulties of obtaining the necessary legislation both from Pennsylvania and New York State are not pertinent to this story, but when the citizens of Wayne County learned that the Erie was about to come into their State a number of them seeing the benefit to be derived from it, made strenuous efforts to induce the Erie to consider a route up the Lackawaxen, past Honesdale, to the headwaters of Starucca Creek, thence to the Susquehanna, but they were stalemated. Every turn for the then existing legislature would not permit the use of this route and at each meeting called by these far-seeing citizens, every proposal favoring the Erie was voted down. It developed later that the canal company had "packed" the meeting with its employees and their friends.

This route, by the way, was some twenty miles shorter and of much easier grade than the one followed.

Reasons For Obstructions

The Delaware & Hudson Canal Company, it now appears, had two reasons for obstructing these plans: first, they feared the Erie as a rival coal carrier, and second, they were then in the process of buying more coal lands in the Lackawanna Valley and the approach of the Erie most certainly would have caused the value of these lands to sky-rocket. (At the time, Senator Dimmick, of Honesdale, represented Wayne and Pike Counties in the State Legislature, and was also attorney for the D. & H. Canal Company).

As the raftsmen 20 years before had resented the coming of the canal the boatmen now resented the coming of the Erie Railroad, through the valley of the Delaware, for they saw in it a threat to their means of livelihood, but again it is hard to say which side was the aggressor. The intruding railroad crossed the line of the canal at what now is the town of Lackawaxen, but at the time the Erie was under construction through Pike County, the railroad bridge across the Delaware at Saw Mill Rift had not yet been completed. Consequently, when a locomotive was needed to speed the construction in the Delaware section, the new engine "Piermont" was dismantled and shipped through the canal to